

SWAHILI AND THE DILEMMA OF UGANDAN LANGUAGE POLICY*

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The language situation in East Africa is characterized by the widespread use of Swahili. While both in Tanzania and Kenya Swahili has been systematically promoted in all spheres of everyday life, Uganda has lacked a coherent government policy on language development and the position of Swahili in Uganda has always been very ambiguous. The continued vacillation over language policy and the Luganda/Swahili opposition threatening to carve the country into two major camps of language choice which is characteristic of the Ugandan language situation suggests that the language issue is not likely to be solved in the near future.

Africa probably has the most complex and varied language situation in the world. It is a well known fact that the national boundaries of African countries drawn arbitrarily by the colonial powers at conferences in Europe during the time of the imperial partition of the African continent, pay little regard to the historical, cultural and linguistic affinity of the Africans. Few African states are known for their linguistic homogeneity.¹ Given a very complex language situation in Africa south of the Sahara with African languages co-existing and competing with European languages as well as with various lingua francas, Pidgins and Creoles, multilingualism and hence multilingualism is a feature of most African countries and it seems that it will remain the norm for a long time to come. Much has been written about the role of multilingualism in an era of state con-

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¹ There are some countries in Africa south of the Sahara with more than 90 per cent homogeneity of population, where one African language is spoken by the majority of the population as a mother tongue, namely Somalia (Somali), Swaziland (Seswati), Botswana (Setswana), Burundi (Kirundi), Lesotho (Sesotho) and Rwanda (Kinyarwanda). In some other countries one African language is spoken by the vast majority of the population as a lingua franca.

struction in Africa.² Despite the need for linguistic homogenization, the emergence of a single, dominant language in each state understood by most citizens, which would become the official language for administration, education and cultural life is unlikely to be the typical pattern of African national development. The continued dependence of most African governments on ex-colonial metropolitan languages has led some African scholars to speak of “linguistic imperialism”.³ Facility in the language of the former metropolis has been a key to élite positions throughout the continent. The notion of a “repertoire” has been introduced to analyse the number of languages an individual needs in everyday life. A repertoire in Africa usually includes:

1. the vernacular or primary language
2. the African lingua franca, and/or
3. the language of colonial contact⁴

Thus Africans seeking middle-class urban opportunities and occupational mobility need to have facility in 3 plus or minus 1 languages.

On the other hand, official communication with the rural masses is impeded and ineffectual. Multilingualism and the dominance of ex-colonial languages in official use and in education has been seen by many African politicians and intellectuals as a major impediment to national integration and development of nation-states demanding too much of the human and material resources. Some African scholars even argue that “the continuous use of English or French or Portuguese as lingua franca impedes the development of African unity culturally, economically and politically”.⁵ To quote one African scholar, “The dominance of the metro-languages deprives the majority of Africans of access to knowledge, and hinders them from participating in national politics and the decision-making process. It slows down national integration and development of a nation-state, with a national culture, creates insecurity and feeling of inferiority among those who have to operate in the foreign language of the ruling élite. This has led to ethnic unrest, political instability and brutal violence from time to time in sev-

² See e.g. ALEXANDRE, Pierre: *Langue et langage en Afrique Noire*. Paris 1967, WHITELEY, W.H. (Ed.): *Language Use and Social Change. Problems of Multilingualism with Special Reference to Eastern Africa*. Oxford University Press 1971, LAITIN, David D.: *Language Repertoires and State Construction in Africa*. Cambridge University Press 1992.

³ See e.g. LODHI, Abdulaziz Y.: *The Language Situation in Africa Today*. In: *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 1993, pp. 79-86, esp. 82. Also MHINA, George A.: *Problems Being Faced in the Process of Developing African Languages with Special Reference to Kiswahili*. In: *Kiswahili*, vol. 42, 1, 1972, pp. 43-57 and INDAKWA, John: *A ‘Lingua Franca’ for Africa. A Study of the Need for a Common African Language*. In: *Kiswahili*, vol. 48, 1, 1978, pp. 57-73. Indakwa speaks rather of cultural imperialism. Cf. with RUBONGYA, L.T.: *The Language and Culture of a People*. In: *Présence Africaine*, No. 94, 1975, pp. 13-30 and some other contributions in the same volume dealing with African languages and their role in fostering African cultural identity.

⁴ LAITIN, David D.: *Language Repertoires and State Construction in Africa*. Cambridge University Press 1992, op.cit.

⁵ INDAKWA, J.: op.cit., p. 59.

eral parts of Africa where the main political problems are not really ideological but rather ethno-linguistic. Peace is a pre-requisite for growth and prosperity, and in the African context, peace may be maintained only through some degree of national integration achieved by a reasonable amount of linguistic homogenization. Language development in all forms should therefore be part and parcel of overall development.”⁶

Even though the notion that the imposition of a single national language or even the eventual continental adoption of Swahili and/or Hausa could be a key to political, economic and cultural progress in Africa has been recently criticized,⁷ there is no doubt that in addition to English, French or Portuguese, any African state needs to cultivate a common language for mass inter-ethnic communication. A wish to impose a single indigenous language in the interest of national unity and development has been repeatedly expressed but rarely implemented.⁸ One successful exception has been Tanzania, and to a lesser extent Kenya, where Swahili was declared the national language soon after self-government in 1961.

The language situation in East Africa is characterized by the widespread use of Swahili as a lingua franca and since the 1960s as the official and national language in Tanzania and Kenya. The Swahili language has been considered “unique among the African languages of the modern world for the dynamism of its development”.⁹ Swahili, which was originally spoken only on the East African coast strip and was a mother tongue to only about a million Swahili people,¹⁰ had long ago acquired the status of an inter-ethnic means of communication facilitating intercourse between different ethnic units and nationalities. In the nineteenth century Swahili spread over large areas of Eastern and Central Africa as a lingua franca indispensable to traders, travellers, missionaries and colonial

⁶ LODHI, A.Y.: op. cit., p. 82.

⁷ See LAITIN, D.D.: op. cit.

⁸ According to Abdulaziz Y. LODHI, op. cit., pp. 80-81, it is difficult to find a comprehensive document in African countries defining language policies. In several African countries an African language has been chosen as the first or second official language together with an ex-colonial European language, e.g. Amharic in Ethiopia or Chichewa in Malawi, together with English.

⁹ Swahili as “the only African language in the continent of Africa that owes no allegiance to any particular ethnic group of people among its speakers”, is claimed by some scholars to be “the only African language...that can bring together the peoples of Africa to become a people of UNITED STATES OF AFRICA”. KOMBO, Salum M.: *The Role of Swahili Language in Tanzania as Both National and Working Language*. In: *Kiswahili*, Vol. 42, 1, 1972.

¹⁰ It has been argued recently that some form of Proto-standard Swahili was being spoken on the East African Coast before the tenth century. See WHITELEY, W.: *Swahili. The Rise of a National Language*. London, Methuen 1969. At least it is certain that Swahili was a well-established language in the second half of the 15th century when the Portuguese arrived in East Africa. OLSON, Howard S.: *Swahili as an Educational Medium*. In: *Kiswahili*, Vol. 42, No. 1, March 1972, p. 4.

administrators. In addition to Tanzania and Kenya, Swahili is spoken now in varying degrees in Uganda, Zaire, Rwanda, Burundi, in parts of Ethiopia, Somalia, Zambia, Malawi, Mozambique and Madagascar, and the number of Swahili speakers is estimated to run as high as fifty million and is today increasing faster than the number of speakers of any other language.¹¹

The pre-colonial roots of the use of Swahili in the East African countries were, however, not identical and the language policy of the colonial administration was an important factor that influenced the language situation in Uganda and the two neighbouring countries of Kenya and Tanzania. Though in Tanzania Swahili had obtained and maintained some sort of official recognition since the times of the German administration and the German policy of using Swahili in the lower levels of administration and in the field of education was continued during British colonial rule, its position in the neighbouring countries has been different, and in the case of Uganda very ambiguous.

About 120 vernacular languages are spoken in Tanzania but diversity is compensated by the very wide spread of Bantu languages and the nearly universal comprehension of Swahili, even in the nineteenth century. After initial hesitation and wavering over the use of Swahili as a lingua franca due to its Islamic connotations, a programme of making Swahili the general lingua franca was adopted in German-dominated Tanganyika. Swahili was made a language of administration and an official medium of communication between the German administration and the local population. Swahili was also introduced into schools as the medium of instruction. As a consequence of such a colonial government language policy, the colonial authorities only supported those schools which held classes in Swahili or in German.¹² The adoption of Swahili as a lingua franca and its introduction in schools and within the lower levels of administration, no doubt contributed greatly to the spread of Swahili in up-country rural areas and to its increasing use among persons of different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. European Christian missions also played an important role in the spread of the Swahili language. Swahili became a rallying factor against the colonial rule during the Maji Maji war of 1905-1907, when it was used by differ-

¹¹ OLSON, H.S.: op.cit, p. 5. Olson quotes MWANGOMANGO, J.: *Matumaini ya Kuenza Kiswahili Africa*. In: *Kiswahili*, Vol. 40, 1, 1970, p. 51, who called Swahili the seventh largest language in the world according to the number of its speakers, and ALLEN, John: *The Case for Developing Swahili*. In: *East Africa Journal*, May 1965, p. 33, who wrote: "We are... compelled to accept the fact that today more people in East Africa know Swahili than any other language, and that the number of Swahili speakers is today increasing faster than the number of speakers of any other language." Cf. with OHLY, Rajmund: *Swahili to Be a World Language*. In: OHLY, R.: *Swahili Studies*, A Supplement to *Kiswahili*, vol. 47, 1, March 1977, pp. 119-128.

¹² ALTEHENDER-SMITH, Sherida: Language Planning and Language Policy in Tanzania during the German Colonial Period. In: *Kiswahili*, Journal of the Institute of Kiswahili Research, vol. 48, No. 2, 1978, pp. 73-80, also WHITELEY, W.H. (Ed.): *Language Use and Social Change*, op. cit.

ent mother-tongue speakers as a common communication medium.¹³ The rebellion added a further impetus to the earlier German commitment to the promotion of Swahili, because after its defeat Germans adopted a language policy favouring Swahili more than ever before. The official German language policy which supported the emergence of Swahili as an inter-ethnic medium of communication prepared the ground for expanding and improving the Swahili language and for the eventual promotion of Swahili as the national and the official language of Tanzania in the post independence era. A landmark in the history of the development of Swahili as the official language of Tanzania was President Nyerere's Republic Day speech of 10 December 1962 which he delivered in Swahili. "By declaring Kiswahili the official language ("Lugha ya Taifa") which has to be used in all spheres of economic and political activities, in education, including the functional literacy campaigns, the mass media, army as well as in culture, which gave birth to a new type of Kiswahili literature, and even in religion, a new quality in the spread of that language has been achieved."¹⁴ As a result, Swahili as a lingua franca is spoken in Tanzania by almost 95 per cent of the Tanzanian citizens and used in all spheres of communication.

In Kenya, apart from Swahili, which is estimated to be spoken by 60 to 70 per cent of the population, there are about twenty different languages used. Kenya hesitated for a longer time than Tanzania to adopt a clear position with respect to Swahili. Since, however, a large percentage of the population wants Swahili to be implemented on a large scale, the Kenyan government was forced to adopt Swahili as the official language.¹⁵

The language situation in East Africa well exemplifies the role of language policy decisions in the process of acquisition and spread of a lingua franca. In four out of the five countries that Uganda shares a border with Swahili is spoken. Still Uganda has been hesitating for a very long time to adopt a clear position with respect to Swahili. While both in Tanzania and Kenya Swahili has been systematically promoted in all spheres of everyday life and adapted to the expansion of its social functions, and its vocabulary has been enriched and systematically developed, much has been argued against Swahili in Uganda which has chosen "to remain a chaotic island of English and 'tribal' languages surrounded by neighbours who opted for Swahili".¹⁶ Unlike Tanzania and Kenya, English remains the national language of Uganda and Swahili has no official status at all.

¹³ Due to its integrative qualities Swahili has ever since served as a trans-ethnic medium of communication and, to quote a Swahili scholar, "all movements of national focus in Tanzania have used Swahili as an instrument for achieving inter-tribal unity and integration". See ABDULAZIZ, M.A.: *Tanzania's National Language Policy and the Rise of Swahili Political Culture*. In: WHITELEY, W.H. (Ed.): *Language Use and Social Change*, op. cit.

¹⁴ BRAUNER, S. – KAPINGA, C. – LEGERE, K.: *Kiswahili and Local Languages in Tanzania. A Sociolinguistic Study*. In: *Kiswahili*, vol. 48, No. 2, 1978, p. 7.

¹⁵ WHITELEY, W.H. (Ed.): *Language Use and Social Change*. op. cit. and WHITELEY, W.H.: *Swahili. The Rise of a National Language*, op. cit., pp. 67-73.

The language problem in Uganda is an old one. Uganda has thirty different African languages in addition to Swahili, its linguistic diversity is, however, extreme even for Africa. Uganda lies on the crossroads of several main language groups of Africa. The linguistic diversity had been coupled during the colonial period by the diversity of economic, social and political modes among the inhabitants of Uganda creating a conflict-prone situation. The south and west comprising Buganda, Ankole, Kigezi, Tooro and Bunyoro are Bantu-speaking areas, and nearly two-thirds of the population of Uganda speak one of the closely related Bantu languages, the Eastern Bantu languages (Luganda, Lusoga, Lumasaba/Lugisu, Lugwere, Lunyole, Lusamia/Lugwe) are spoken by a third of the country's population, while the Western Bantu languages (Runyankole, Rukiga, Runyarwanda, Rutoro, Runyoro, Rurundi, Rukonjo, Rwamba) are spoken by almost an equal proportion. The largest language - Luganda is, however, spoken as a first language by only sixteen per cent of the population and no other language is spoken by more than half this number. There are a large number of languages spoken by small but approximately equal number of people, and there are four language sub-groups. The North-East can be associated with Eastern Nilotic languages (Akaramojong, Ateso, Kakwa and Sebei), the North with the Western Nilotic languages (Lango, Acholi, Alur, Dhopadhola and Kumam) and the extreme North-west with the Central Sudanic languages (Lugbara and Madi).¹⁷ The continued vacillation over language policy is characteristic of the Ugandan language situation ever since the imposition of colonial rule.

Swahili is not new to Uganda. It was introduced into the country long before the coming of Europeans and used as a trade language and a means of inter-ethnic communication in the kingdoms of Buganda and Bunyoro as well as other parts of the present-day Uganda. In the first years of the existence of the Uganda Protectorate Swahili was widely used by officials and unofficials alike to suit administrative and educational convenience. English was inevitably introduced as the major language of administration, law and of higher levels of education from an early period, though Swahili held a rival official position for a brief period. Before 1900 it was used by both missions and the colonial administrations and between 1900-1912 it was the Official Local Language.¹⁸ However, the pro-Swahili language policy in Uganda did not last long. The inconsistent language

¹⁶ Weekly Topic, 1.10.1986, quoted in: MUKAMA, Ruth: *The Linguistic Dimension of Ethnic Conflict*. In: RUPESINGHE, Kumar (Ed.): *Conflict Resolution in Uganda*. Oslo, International Peace Research Institute 1989, p. 192.

¹⁷ CRIPER, Clive – LADEFOGED, Peter: *Linguistic Complexity in Uganda*. In: WHITELY, W.H. (Ed.): *Language Use and Social Change*, op. cit, pp. 145-159, also LADEFOGED, Peter – GLICK, Ruth – CRIPER, Clive: *Language in Uganda*. London, Oxford University Press 1972 and DOORNBOS, Martin R.: *Ugandan Society and Politics: A Background*, Chapter 1, pp. 3-16 and DENOON, Donald: *The Historical Setting to 1900*, Chapter 2, pp. 17-56. Both in: UZOIGWE, G.N. (Ed.): *Uganda. The Dilemma of Nationhood*. New York – London – Lagos, NOK Publishers International 1982.

¹⁸ LADEFOGED et al.: *Language in Uganda*, op. cit, pp. 22-24.

policy of the British administration in Uganda was one of the important factors that influenced the language situation in Uganda and the position of Swahili during the colonial period.

The colonial language choice discussion which took place in the early period of the colonial rule concerned itself with the general attitudes towards language use as well as with the policy towards language choice used in mission schools and in administration. A significant group involved in the language discussion was the Church Missionary Society. The missionary factor played a very important role. In Uganda as elsewhere in Africa missionaries were indispensable for the implementation of any language policy because the schools were entirely in their hands. The language policy of Christian missions in Africa varied according to geographical areas and ethnic setting, often within missions of the same denomination or within the same mission. Christianity came to Uganda long before the imposition of colonial rule.¹⁹ Of necessity both the Anglican Church Missionary Society and the Catholic White Fathers had at first used Swahili as a medium of instruction but the position of Swahili in Uganda was from the outset in the eyes of the church jeopardized by its association with Islam, a rival and "inferior" religion and soon both missions strove to introduce local languages arguing that the Christian message would be properly understood only if it were taught in the mother tongue.²⁰

Soon after the establishment of the colonial rule there was a drive to make Luganda the lingua franca of the Protectorate. A Buganda syndrome seems to have characterized the missions' language policy. The C.M.S. argued strongly against Swahili and for the use of Luganda as the official language of the Protectorate. Also Catholic White Fathers who in their East African missions used both Swahili and vernaculars, in Uganda eventually turned from Swahili and increasingly favoured the use of Luganda and other vernaculars. The C.M.S. mission's preference for Luganda was made quite clear by its refusal to teach Swahili in the schools.²¹

¹⁹ The origins of the Church Missionary Society and of the White Fathers Mission date in Uganda from almost exactly the same time. Though the first two members of the C.M.S. mission to Uganda arrived in June 1877, one was murdered south of the Lake and the other withdrew. The C.M.S. mission was thus actually established in November 1878. The White Fathers arrived three months later, in February 1879.

²⁰ This practice has continued until today. Neither Catholic nor Anglican Church have adopted a nation-wide language to be used in services or church affairs. The language problem in the Uganda Protectorate, the role of the missionary factor and of the Luganda syndrome in the quest for a language policy in Uganda is discussed in detail by HANSEN, H.B.: *Mission, Church and State in a Colonial Setting*. Uganda 1890-1925. London 1984, Chapters 21 and 22, especially pp. 383-395. However, he did not discuss the language policy of the two other Christian missions, namely the two Catholic missions, the White Fathers and the Mill Hill Mission.

²¹ Tucker to Sadler, 30 Nov. 1903, E.S.A., A22/1, copy in F.O.2/792, quoted also in Hansen, op. cit.

Luganda was the first local vernacular reduced to writing and was preferred because of the alleged inherent qualities of the Baganda. Initially virtually all contact of the Europeans was with the kingdom of Buganda and from the very beginning and especially after the signing of the 1900 Uganda Agreement, Buganda occupied a central place in the affairs the Uganda Protectorate. The power and influence of the Baganda under the patronage of the British ensured the high status of their language and its position as a language of administration and of church. The appointment of Baganda evangelists and administrative agents to various parts of the Protectorate contributed further to the spread of the Luganda language.²² However, the missions' policy to translate the Bible into the local vernaculars disqualified Luganda as the universal language in the Protectorate. The missions had gradually committed the various local languages to writing and used them as the medium of instruction in their schools. Another reason was the connection between Luganda and the Buganda influence which was, however, gradually curtailed on a Protectorate-wide level. The Baganda made themselves very unpopular among other ethnic groups during the period they acted as agents of the colonial administration because of the methods they used. The Baganda agents were often seen – as indeed they may have seen themselves – as extending the power and influence of Buganda, and in due course reaction against both language and people set in. Some C.M.S. missionaries supported African pressure for the recognition of other vernaculars, namely Runyoro/Rutoro within the church. This constituted an element of opposition to the Luganda monopoly. The fact that some recognition was given to Runyoro/Rutoro during the days of Bishop Tucker²³ did not mean, however, that the C.M.S. abandoned its language policy and its longer-term aim of promoting Luganda as the primary language of the Protectorate and the mission requested at an early stage the Protectorate government's support for the Luganda alternative.

Despite verbal assurances and a declaration of intent to support the Mission's policy of making Luganda the primary language of the Protectorate, the Administration took a passive line and adopted a wait-and-see policy making in the meantime Swahili obligatory and Luganda and some other Bantu and Nilotic

²² PIROUET, M.L.: *Black Evangelists. The spread of Christianity in Uganda 1891-1914*. London, Rex Collings 1978; ROBERTS, A.D.: *The Sub-Imperialism of the Baganda*. In: *Journal of African History* 3, 3, 1962, pp. 435-450; TWADDLE, M.: *The Bakungu Chiefs of Buganda under British Colonial Rule, 1900-1930*. In: *Journal of African History* 10, 2, 1969, pp. 309-322.

²³ While some missionaries based outside Buganda favoured the use of other vernaculars within the church, a group in the C.M.S., led by Archdeacon Walker, advocated the use of Luganda for the sake of unity within both the church and state. Bishop Tucker took up the position between these two: while he was willing to grant concessions to the vernaculars in deference to the strength of the national feeling in the two Western kingdoms, he upheld the primacy of Luganda at higher levels. The conflict is described in great detail by Hansen, op. cit., pp. 383-386.

languages “bonus languages”.²⁴ The Commissioner explained his policy of upgrading of Swahili and pointed to the practical reasons of this language decision. Swahili proved to be an easier language to learn than Luganda, of more general application and accordingly more suitable to colonial officials. If, however, the mission succeeded in its Luganda alternative, he promised to reinstate Luganda as the obligatory language.

The language policy of the Protectorate Administration was, however, soon reversed, when Jackson returned to Uganda as Governor in 1911 and recommended Luganda as the new obligatory language. “Jackson’s major argument was the status of the Baganda in the Protectorate, not only numerically, but also qualitatively.”²⁵ Accordingly Luganda was made the obligatory language for all officials from 1912 onwards. Swahili and a number of other local languages continued to be bonus languages.²⁶

The Swahili-Luganda controversy did not end there and then and it was to be raised again in the following years.

There was a new round of discussions on Luganda’s status in 1918-1919. Since the language policy met with difficulties outside Buganda, especially in the non-Bantu areas and the Northern Province, colonial officials based there strongly recommended that Swahili should be re-established as a permanent official language, “especially since it could facilitate communications with the East African Protectorate and German East Africa”.²⁷

The merits of Swahili from an administrative point of view were frequently voiced between 1912 and 1920. The intervention of the European planter and business community who argued in favour of Swahili for commercial and communications reasons, sparked off a new round of talks in 1919-20. During the latter months of 1919 in connection with the work of the Uganda Development Commission, the C.M.S. could for the first time since the days of Bishop Tucker publicly state its views on the language issue.²⁸ The Government language policy had to be linked to that of the missions, especially the C.M.S. mission, since the missions ran the schools and their recommendations could not have been overlooked. The Protectorate Government gave protagonists on both sides opportunities to state their case and made a number of pronouncements on language policy.

The discussions remained inconclusive. Faced with the opposing and conflicting views, the question of the official language was not solved by the Ugan-

²⁴ Sadler to F.O., 1 December 1903, FO 2/792. Quoted from Hansen, op. cit, p. 384.

²⁵ Jackson to Secretary of State, 4 July 1912, Copy in SMP 134. Quoted in: HANSEN, H.B.: *Mission, Church and State*, op. cit., p. 387.

²⁶ Secretary of State to Jackson, 10 August 1912, SMP 134 quoted by Hansen, p. 387.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 387-388. The Governor dismissed the argument as invalid and kept Luganda as the official language.

²⁸ The C.M.S. mission argued against Swahili and for the use of Luganda as the official language of the Protectorate, foreseeing that English would in the future supplant Luganda. See Hansen, op. cit., pp. 388-395.

da Development Commission. Backed by the C.M.S. mission Luganda held its ground against Swahili even though the Provincial Commissioners' conference that took place in November 1920 supported Swahili as the official language and recommended that the missions be asked to teach it in their schools.²⁹ It was decided that Luganda was to remain the official language of the Protectorate and the obligatory language for government officials,³⁰ though the long-term aim was to make English the language of the country. Eventually in 1922 the Provincial Commissioners gave up trying to make Swahili the official language.

The C.M.S. had thus succeeded over the years, with the help of the other missions, in combating the forces within the colonial administration who favoured Swahili, but it did not succeed in making Luganda the universal language of the Protectorate. Neither the C.M.S. mission nor the colonial government pursued a uniform language policy. The policy of the toleration of smaller African languages and of linguistic plurality deteriorated the fortunes of both Luganda and Swahili. The mission actually experienced a split within its own ranks between supporters of Luganda and of the various vernaculars, but was largely united in its opposition to Swahili. The Protectorate government was torn between Swahili and Luganda.³¹

The drive for East African Unity in the later 1920s strengthened reasons for the reintroduction of Swahili. Swahili was proposed as the official language of all three East African territories. In 1927 The Governor, Sir W.F. Gowers, wrote a memorandum entitled "The Development of Ki-Swahili as an Educational and Administrative Language in the Uganda Protectorate".³² Since the 1925 settlement of the language issue did not work in practice, a compromise solution was adopted in 1927, and reaffirmed by the colonial government in 1932. Despite vehement protests by the Baganda, including the Kabaka and some missionaries, Swahili was reintroduced in the mixed language areas, in the Northern and Eastern Provinces, and also in the non-Baganda Bantu areas. The vernaculars re-

²⁹ HANSEN: *op. cit.* pp. 390-391. The newly arrived Protectorate officials usually had some knowledge of Swahili which was an easier language to master than Luganda. According to Hansen, "The characteristic pattern was that officials working outside Buganda tended to support Swahili, while those connected with Buganda were in favour of Luganda." The supporters of Swahili also thought it wiser to adopt the neutral Swahili than the language of any particular national as the official language which could provoke hostility from the others. *Ibid.*, p. 389.

³⁰ With certain exceptions, Acholi or Gang in the north, Runyoro in Bunyoro and Toro, and Swahili in Kigezi.

³¹ However, in education Luganda was not used in the whole Protectorate. Out of respect for the use of the mother tongue in elementary education, it was approved at the end of 1925 that instruction in elementary schools was to be given according to the three main language groups; Luganda was to be the language of instruction in the Bantu areas, Acholi or Gang in parts of the Northern and Eastern Provinces, and Iteso in parts of the Eastern Province. See HANSEN: *op. cit.*, p. 392.

³² WHITELEY: *Swahili. The Rise of a National Language*, p. 70.

mained the medium of instruction, but Swahili was to be taught as an optional subject. It was also to be taught in the Teacher Training Colleges. As for Buganda, it was underlined that the medium of instruction there would always be Luganda.³³

A turning point came in 1952 when an important language policy decision “that Swahili was no longer a recognized vernacular in Uganda schools” was taken.³⁴ From that date there was no further question of Swahili participating in Uganda’s linguistic planning, though Swahili has continued to be the official language in the police force and in the army.

Even after Uganda became independent, the new Government did not adopt any clear-cut policy towards implementation of Swahili, and ever since the Independence, Uganda has lacked a coherent government policy on language and language development and its successive governments overlooked the language variable in their development programmes and policies. In multilingual countries like Uganda, the language factor represents quite a problem which underlies and effects all developmental programmes. In the whole post-independence era no consistent attempt has been made to deal with language problems and none of the governments has taken practical steps to give the country a common medium of communication.

In 1967 Obote’s government found no alternative to English in Uganda present position and adopted English as the official language. However, on being installed as Chancellor of Makerere University in October 1970, shortly before his overthrow in 1971, Dr. Obote promised that “the Government would endeavour to introduce the teaching of Swahili into the schools” and urged the University “to establish a proper school for African languages”. The Government never fulfilled its promise.³⁵

During Idi Amin’s rule Swahili was given a perspective. In 1973 Idi Amin initiated a countrywide national language debate involving the choice between Swahili and Luganda. Twelve districts voted then in favour of Swahili while eight districts voted for Luganda which testified to a persisting cleavage between two ethnic blocs with regard to Swahili. The bloc favouring Luganda was led by Buganda and supported by four of her historical vassals – Busoga, Bugisu and Bukedi in the Eastern region and Ankole in the Western region.³⁶ After weeks of deliberations, on 7 August 1973 Swahili was declared the national language of Uganda by decree. The decree was, however, never implemented in practice, although it has never been repealed by successive governments.³⁷

³³ HANSEN, op. cit., p. 393.

³⁴ LADEFOGED et. al., op. cit., p. 91.

³⁵ MUKAMA, Ruth: *The Linguistic Dimension of Ethnic Conflict*, op. cit., pp. 179-180.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 181. The position of the Luganda language in the districts that supported the Luganda alternative may be traced to the activities of Baganda catechists and agents of the colonial administration during the early years of our century.

³⁷ MUKAMA, Ruth: *The Linguistic Dimension of Ethnic Conflict*, op. cit., pp. 181-205.

The Luganda/Swahili opposition has threatened to carve Uganda into two major camps of language choice or two major ethnic blocs: Bantu-versus non-Bantu, the latter being the chief supporters of Swahili alternative, while among the former, the Western Bantu – Bunyoro and Tooro resisted Luganda. While people from the north speaking non-Bantu languages have thought that Uganda should follow the other two East African countries in using Swahili in schools and in public life, people in southern parts of Uganda, especially those from the Luganda speaking area, have seen no useful purpose in introducing Swahili in Uganda and would prefer one Ugandan language, Luganda, to be taken as the national language and lingua franca.³⁸

To quote a Ugandan scholar, “The crux of the language issue is still the problem of the position of Luganda *vis-a-vis* the other indigenous languages on the one hand, and Luganda *vis-a-vis* Swahili on the other. The only historical difference is that the Luganda advancement crusade that was originally led by the European missionaries is now solely spearheaded by the Baganda activists themselves.³⁹ In 1968 Radio Uganda was broadcasting in sixteen Ugandan languages as well as English and Hindustani,⁴⁰ by 1989 the number of Ugandan languages on the radio rose to nineteen, bringing the overall total to twenty-one, with English and Swahili, and according to Mukama in the early 1990s the number of languages that were broadcast on radio were twenty-five out of the thirty distinct languages.⁴¹ By 1968, literacy campaigns had been conducted in twenty different languages, but there was hardly any literature in most of these languages for further reading to strengthen and sustain their literacy acquisition. English has been the official language and six Ugandan languages (some of them paired) have been specified as media of instruction in the primary schools: Luganda, Runyoro/Rutooro, Runyankore/Rukiga, Lugbara, Lwo and Akarimojong/Ateso. Since 1973, Swahili has been the national language of Uganda by decree, but there is no official policy on the language and since 1952 Swahili has been taught only to the police and armed forces. The Uganda Swahili Association (Chama cha Kiswahili – Chaku), founded in December 1984, has been recently revived, but Swahili is still in a much less favourable position than Luganda, whose development has been spearheaded by the Luganda Language Society and the Luganda Academy. According to Mukama, Luganda language activity has been booming in publication and research, in mass media and in the performing arts.⁴²

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 196-198.

³⁹ MUKAMA, Ruth G.: *Getting Ugandans to Speak a Common Language. Recent developments in the language situation and prospects for the future*. In: HANSEN, Holger Bernt – TWADDLE, Michael (Eds): *Changing Uganda. The Dilemmas of Structural Adjustment & Revolutionary Change*. London, James Currey etc. 1991, pp. 334-351.

⁴⁰ LADEFOGED et al.: p. 21.

⁴¹ MUKAMA, Ruth: *Getting Ugandans to Speak a Common Language*, pp. 346-347.

⁴² MUKAMA, Ruth: *Getting Ugandans to Speak a Common Language*, op. cit., pp. 337-340.

Recent research into the language situation in Uganda has proved that people living outside Buganda would be most unwilling to have Luganda as a national language.⁴³ Apparently much of the latent hostility felt towards the Baganda on account of their previous position as agents of the colonial power and as a people having greater access to educational and economic opportunities found its expression in an open rejection of Luganda as either a national language or even as a lingua franca or official language to be used throughout the Bantu-speaking areas.⁴⁴ People in the north and west have always feared the privileged position of the Baganda and refused to countenance the use of Luganda, even though it is the sole local indigenous language with a wide-enough base in terms of first and second-language speakers and of published literatures to become the national language.⁴⁵

In Uganda neither Swahili nor Luganda or any other local vernacular is generally accepted by the whole population and it is unlikely that one particular language could be in use throughout the country.

The national language issue in Uganda is not likely to be solved in the near future. Luganda-Swahili opposition is still alive today. English has always been the language of the educated élite and is unlikely to serve as a language of mass communication. The language policy in Uganda must therefore address the problem of the interrelationship between Luganda and other indigenous languages and between Luganda and Swahili. Swahili has always been the language of the police and army. Pidgin Swahili has also continued to be loosely used as an urban and group employees' lingua franca. The advantage of Swahili is that it cuts across all regional and sub-regional, ethnic and linguistic discord. Compared to Luganda, Swahili as a lingua franca in a conflict-prone country like Uganda has a greater potential to transcend ethnic dissention.

⁴³ LADEFOGED et al.: *Language in Uganda*, p. 29.

⁴⁴ CRIPER – LADEFOGED: *Linguistic Complexity in Uganda*. In: WHITELEY, W.H. (Ed.): *Language Use and Social Change*, op. cit., VII, p. 147.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 147.